

CASE STUDY

# Digital Manuscripts as Sites of Touch: Using Social Media for “Hands-On” Engagement with Medieval Manuscript Materiality

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## Introduction

Medieval manuscripts were made to be handled: to be read, to be touched, to be annotated, even kissed.<sup>1</sup> Those fortunate enough to work directly with surviving written heritage continue to enact *some* of these physical reading practices in modern archives; augmented perhaps by modern interests in material philology and the history of the book, archivists, librarians, and researchers endeavor to unpick and decode the layers of textual and codicological evidence that make medieval manuscripts so fascinating. Never neutral carriers of text, manuscripts provide a window to the sociohistorical contexts in which they were produced, used, and abused.<sup>2</sup> Manuscripts are complex objects; even if we—for one brief moment—disregard their individual, lived-object biographies, we are left with substantial data concerning their physical and textual contents.

This complexity is particularly striking when we undertake to display items from our written past, be this physically in an exhibition or via a digitized facsimile. The environmental conditions required for physical and/or digital display dictate a number of immediate choices, while the physical format of books, as multifaceted and manipulable objects, means that curators must choose between innumerable points of possible access in order that these items might be seen at all.<sup>3</sup> In either case, once exhibited, one may argue that manuscripts lose various qualities that make them inherently sensory objects; once immobile behind glass, or even once partially disembodied as digital pages, they are transformed as exhibits into fixed or partially fixed object-states.<sup>4</sup> Loxley et al. point out in their study of the exhibition of the written word that, “[w]ords are not normally uttered, written or printed with the intention that they should end up in a glass case . . . reading, in all its different forms, is . . . a fundamentally different activity to that of viewing an object in a museum or a gallery.”<sup>5</sup> Neither, of course, is the codex itself thus produced; books do not lend themselves easily to display, whether physical or digital. Much ink has been spilled over the material or sensory loss(es) experienced when viewing a book behind glass, be this the glass of an exhibition case or the screens of our computers, tablets, and smartphones; indeed, the 2014 issue (*Re*)*Presenting the Archive* in this very journal tackles a number of these questions in relation to archival materials, including medieval manuscripts.<sup>6</sup> Crucial to this discussion is a consideration of how visitors to exhibits or users of digital manuscripts make meaning when they encounter these abstracted objects, particularly in terms of their material engagement with the analogue codex. As Bill Endres points out, visual encounters with digital vs. physical material are two unique experiences that lead to different opportunities for knowledge creation:

*Looking leads to two types of knowing . . . : knowing through semiotics, whether word, image, or feature of the physical artifact, that is, reading or interpreting signs that portray intentional or unintended meaning (unintentional meaning can be derived from the likes of the number of folios in quires or quality of vellum in a manuscript); and knowing through aesthetic experience, the artifact as a manifestation of a community generated aesthetic that is saturated with meaning and expression, inviting viewers into a cultural encounter in which their knowing is remade or where the experience opens the possibility of an altered or enhanced knowing. . . . While any artifact manifests a culture’s aesthetics on some level, objects of art, like . . . an illuminated manuscript, offer heightened or intensified experiences of knowing through aesthetic experience.<sup>7</sup>*

Endres’s work on the first 3-D images of medieval manuscripts—now available for select folios of the St Chad Gospels housed at Lichfield Cathedral<sup>8</sup>—questions the implications for knowing when we view a digital manifestation of a manuscript, rather than looking at the analogue object. He asks, “What happens to our apprehension when a digital artifact has a vanishing point, a sense of open space filling in around it, when we can manipulate the perspective from



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which we view a digital artifact in countless ways?”<sup>9</sup> Here, I would like to extend Endres’s questioning by arguing that cultural heritage custodians (including archivists, librarians, and researchers) *with* hands-on access may approach these material abstractions from an entirely different perspective of knowing than that of a member of the public, or a student or researcher *without* ready access to written heritage, for they have themselves handled—and thus encountered—the sensory experiences of medieval manuscripts in the flesh; they can identify where their (re)presentations of written heritage cease to effectively communicate the whole. But what of those audiences who may have never handled a medieval manuscript, never seen the play of light across an illuminated initial, or felt the texture of a piece of parchment between the fingertips? What of those students who may not have easy access to a medieval manuscript collection for hands-on learning or research? Do they experience these same material losses when viewing manuscripts in analogue or digital facsimile? Given the challenges implicit in offering these communities opportunities for hands-on learning with medieval manuscripts,<sup>10</sup> how else might they engage with the materiality of the medieval book?

### Digital Access to Written Heritage

Of direct concern here are these differences in access between the academy (in which I include archives/archivists, libraries/librarians, and research/researchers with hands-on access) and the public (without).<sup>11</sup> For those working within the academy who have hands-on access, there is potential for manuscript encounters to be both physical and digital: staff may make use of digital images of medieval manuscripts (where available) to aid research, but they may also make use of hands-on examination of their respective manuscripts. In either setting, these experiences with their chosen manuscripts are largely individual. They encounter the manuscript, or a digital manifestation of it, typically alone, one-on-one. Though these experiences are certainly mediated by the regulations of the reading room and the functionality of the digital viewer, these users control their encounters by choosing how they interact with the object in front of them, determining the pace of exploration—which page to open, when to turn, when to pause. However, for the public, physical vs. digital access is further complicated by the respective remoteness of the analogue materials; “physical” access for much of the public may only ever manifest itself as experiencing an open manuscript behind glass at best, rather than a hands-on experience that occurs one-on-one with a manuscript in an collection’s reading room. Indeed, due to manifold reasons including but not limited to cost and geography, manuscript exhibitions may only ever be accessed by a relatively small percentage of the public.<sup>12</sup> This “physical” exhibition-centered encounter cannot be restricted to the individual, because the manuscript is on public display. Thus, a person’s experience of a manuscript is shared with whoever else may be visiting the exhibition at that time. The public’s encounters in exhibition spaces are inherently mediated and beyond their individual control: the manuscript is static and out of reach, the page chosen, and the interpretation limited. Additionally, these “physical” opportunities to encounter written heritage are not necessarily frequent. As a book historian, I am invested in regularly accessing exhibitions of written heritage but have visited only three “physical” exhibitions of medieval manuscripts in the past four years (*The Lindisfarne Gospels*, Durham Palace Green Library, 2014; *Ingenious Impressions*, an exhibition of incunabula at the University of Glasgow, 2015; *The Celts*, an exhibition including medieval manuscript items, National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, 2016). All but one required at least an hour’s travel and the purchase of a ticket to access. My argument here is that for the public, if they access medieval written heritage at all, their primary encounters are likely never to be hands-on and only occasionally occur within exhibition spaces; rather, they are more likely to be digital—the written past encountered online if encountered at all.

With this line of reasoning in mind, one might begin to consider the various points of digital access available for public use. In 2013, Dot Porter’s analysis of researchers’ use of digital scholarly editions compared the results of two surveys undertaken in 2002 and 2011, showing that “medievalists are using print editions more than they are using digital editions, and the use of digital editions has not grown over [these] nine years,” however “facsimiles . . . show a significant movement from print to digital in the same time period that editions show very slight movement.”<sup>13</sup> Given the findings of Porter’s research, we might therefore surmise that public access to digital medieval manuscripts—if it occurs at all—is equally likely not done via the scholarly digital edition, but either via the digital manuscript viewers available through major institutions such as the British Library, or perhaps more likely, given the increased possibilities for serendipitous discovery, via social media.<sup>14</sup> Given manuscript digitization’s focus on the page and text, rather than the 3-D codicological object,<sup>15</sup> the public’s encounters with digital medieval manuscripts are further materially abstracted. Their experience of the “whole book” is wholly reliant on a) their access to digital tools b) resource discovery and ease of access, and c) the use of digital media by custodians who have the requisite access to communicate the multifaceted manuscript or, as Treharne terms it, the *plenitext*.<sup>16</sup> Where these custodians do not, or cannot digitally represent materiality beyond the static 2-D image, the public’s access to the book-as-object stops short. This then blurs the boundaries between analogue and digital materiality. In this scenario, the public engage with the written past through a digital lens, through digital skin, if you will, which for those users then creates a symbiosis between the physical artifact and its digital presence: for these users, the two are inextricably linked. As Jenny Newell explains in her 2012 article, “despite much polemic, few have engaged in sustained analysis and theorizing on the dialectic between tangible heritage and ‘digital culture’; a relationship that is increasingly central to the ways in which people engage with the past.”<sup>17</sup>

My present argument thus considers the theoretical implications of this “digital culture” in mediating public access to written heritage and in communicating materiality. It is my contention that the use of digital media by archives, libraries, and researchers to publicize their collections—here with a specific focus on social media and the platform Instagram—is not simply a means of educational entertainment, or “edutainment,” but is increasingly pushing the

boundaries of how we communicate the materiality of medieval manuscripts *digitally*. Newall further points out, “[s]ince the main uptake of digital technologies by cultural institutions has occurred during the last two decades, the effects of digitization in this context, and the relationship between digital and “real” collections, have only recently become objects of concerted scholarly attention.”<sup>18</sup>

I here argue that digital material encounters enabled by social media platforms are equally worthy of analysis as cultural artifacts in their own right, while providing key points of public access to holistic written heritage. When written heritage is shared via social media, custodians are actively engaged in asking not only *what* the public want to access, but demonstrating *how* simple use of everyday digital media supports such access. By focusing my attention on the social media platform Instagram, I contend that emerging trends in social media content relating to medieval written heritage invoke the presence of curatorial hands—both visible and inferred—which act as tactile and haptic intermediaries to materially disenfranchized audiences. Thus, rather than functioning simply as digital facsimiles which, as Wilcox states, “fail[s] to engage senses other than sight,”<sup>19</sup> Instagram allows curators to return the medieval manuscript, here presented in its digital skin, to a site of touch. In so doing, their work provides a space in which a digital “hands-on” experience, comparable to hands-on learning activities within museum spaces, is made accessible from within medieval manuscript collections.

## Methodology

### The Digital Hand and the Embodied Experience

Hands-on learning has been the focus of sustained theorization and practical development in museum studies and museum settings for the past twenty to thirty years, informing ongoing practice that endeavors to engage visitors in the materiality of objects from the past. The challenge of adopting this approach with our medieval manuscript collections is that such dedicated museum-like spaces for audience encounter are limited, and the displays that may take place in such spaces are temporary. A key aspect of the museum-visitor experience is understood to be the opportunity for visitor “meaning-making” with any of the following: a collection; individual items; the museum building; or the overarching connection to a community, movement, or moment in time.<sup>20</sup> At the center of this process, memory is crucial: “Visitors ‘make meaning’ through a constant process of remembering and connecting. . . . In museums, people attempt to place what they encounter—be it text, object, fact, perspective —within the context of their experience. Thus, memory may be viewed as the core mechanism of meaning-making.”<sup>21</sup>

If we extend this process of remembering and connecting to medieval manuscripts, the material connection between object and audience is the physicality of the book. Even when the public cannot touch the items on display, the relative stability of the medium from medieval manuscript to modern printed book means the audience arrives at the object with a basic sense of *knowing*. While this knowledge may not extend to experiencing what the material of parchment feels like—though a piece of modern parchment might be offered as an interactive part of a physical exhibition—it does extend to what an encounter with a codex structure feels like. They are familiar, at least, with modern knowledge of the technologies of reading analogue materials. As artist Deidre Brollo describes, “While books also increasingly have a digital life, their strong presence as physical objects remains, and so too does our haptic engagement with them . . . handling a book continues to be a quotidian experience.”<sup>22</sup> It is from this shared point of knowing that archives and special collections often work to publicize their holdings, to demonstrate the similarities of medieval books, their contents, their practices to modern reading, or to deviate from this shared knowledge—to challenge it and show how medieval manuscripts might involve surprising or unique reading experiences. The connector, here, is *digital* in the sense of the hand and the finger: with every book we encounter, hands are present, whether these are the hands of the manuscript producer in shaping the codex, the scribe in producing the script, the audience in making their marks in the margins, the hands of modern staff involved in the cataloguing and digitization of these materials, or the modern reader who presses their hands against the exhibition glass, touches the parchment with their fingertips in the reading room, or manipulates its digital avatar by tapping, clicking, or swiping. In presenting the medieval codex, we invoke the known acts of reading and codicological manipulation as a central means of communication, and meaning is made when we play directly with those quotidian experiences and expectations.

However, outside the traditional museum setting, the spaces available for these “meaning-making” opportunities with our written heritage collections changes. If we consider a national collection such as that of the British Library, a digitized manuscript may be considered a form of exhibition space. While the item may well have associated pages, blogs, and so forth that discuss the manuscript’s contents, production, and significance, the digital images themselves currently appear in the digital manuscript viewer with limited apparatus, save their catalogue entry. They are presented without an interpretative intermediary.<sup>23</sup> To those approaching such a resource as a basis for research, navigation of these digital images may proceed relatively unassisted as users’ material knowledge of medieval manuscripts allows them to appreciate the differences—and the sensory, material and contextual limitations—of a 2-D image of a 3-D object. For audiences who do not have this hands-on experience for comparison, gaps emerge in the available digital spaces for “meaning-making.” As Frost explains, “[a]rguably, the most notable difference between the original object and its reproduction is that which results from translating a multidimensional object to a flat two-dimensional scale. Although virtual reality has the potential to reproduce artifacts in many dimensions, the more typical digital representation of a museum object is a two-dimensional plane.”<sup>24</sup>

As has been a common thread in scholarship over the past decade, if not longer,25 material losses are unavoidable during the process of digitization for the simple reason that it is not a process of *replication* but *transformation*; objects are not reproduced, but (re-)created during the digitization process. Thus, said transformation can have significant impact on the experience of the viewer who encounters *only* the digital manifestation. Frost continues, “The more knowledgeable viewer may have in mind the original object and may see the digital through the lens of the original experience. At the same time, the seasoned viewer may view the digital surrogate as a poor substitute, because of this comparison.”26

As Frost’s argument makes clear, often such polemic considers these material losses encountered via physical and digital exhibition from the point of view of the needs of the scholarly audience, be this the academic population of an archive’s university who may visit an exhibition of its manuscript collections, or the potential scholarly audiences requiring digital access for teaching and research. However, when knowledge of the original object is not possible, the digital lens that facilitates encounter is intrinsically bound up with the subsequently constructed idea (we might even term this the “aura” in a Barthian and Benjaminian sense) of the object represented, because comparison between digital and analogue cannot be made. In this sense, we have distinct material lacunae in our public access to written heritage when it is encountered digitally in the 2-D “open book” single- or double-page format typical of many digital manuscript viewers. Those experiences that bring manuscript handling to life within the reading room are inaccessible to those without physical access. As Hapgood and Palincsar explain,

*[whether] and how one experiences objects is a function of the interplay of the characteristics of the object, the knowledge and dispositions that one brings to the viewing, and the context in which one views the object . . . by providing the viewer with different lenses to bring to their experiences with objects, exhibits might more successfully realise their educative potential.*27

Performative Materiality

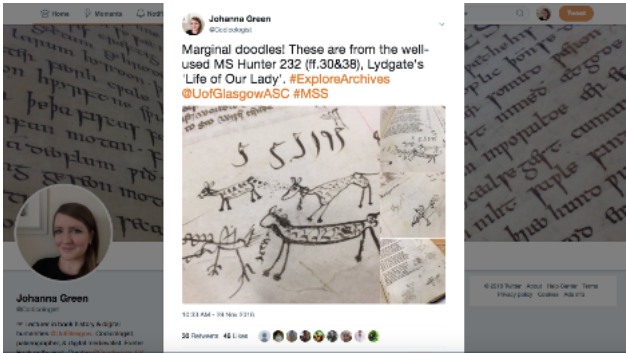
When we transfer this argument to potential public engagement with digital objects, questions of digital materiality are central. In a 2013 article on the performative materiality of digital media, Johanna Drucker reminds us that digital media can embody, demonstrate, perform, and transmit materiality in a number of ways, from *forensic* materiality (*which* refers to evidence) to *formal* materiality (which refers to the codes and structures of human expression). As her article makes very clear, the digital is never *immaterial*. Further, not only do digital media have their own materiality, but they are also sites for knowledge production, for “meaning-making” because of their inherent potential for performative materiality. “Performative materiality suggests that what something *is* has to be understood in terms of what it *does*, how it works within machinic, systemic, and cultural domains.” As Drucker continues to explain, “performative materiality is always probabilistic, since it demonstrates the fact that **material forms are only the site of potential for meaning production**, not for transfer. Media are constitutive of meaning, they do not serve as a conduit or pipeline. **Performative concepts of materiality engage this constitutive principle and the cognitive conditions of production through acts of reading or other embodied individual experience.**”28

Thus, the manuscript image accessed via a digital viewer or via social media has only the *potential* for meaning production; it is via the acts of reading or other embodied individual experiences enacted or performed with that site that meaning might be made. In other words, our digital objects need to engage performatively with their user. While one might argue that the addition of critical apparatus (digital tools for discovery, or interpretative notes and interactive commentary) might assist with such performativity when using a digital manuscript viewer, I here propose that social media, specifically the image-based platform Instagram, may be considered a radical place of performative engagement.

Social Media as Digital “Hands-On”

Social Media as Site of Haptic Engagement

A key component of social media use by archives, libraries, and book historians is to exploit the functionality of these platforms to help “unlock the archives” and offer followers access behind the scenes, or to provide alternative views of items in their collections.





**Figure 1. Smartphone photographs of a previously undigitized manuscript shared via Twitter.** (Johanna Green (@Codicologist), Twitter, November 29, 2016, <https://twitter.com/Codicologist/status/803547377416204288> (<https://twitter.com/Codicologist/status/803547377416204288>).)



**Figure 2. A video showing how the stacks appear in the University of Glasgow's Special Collections. Watch video here** ([https://twitter.com/book\\_historia/status/763106643630579713](https://twitter.com/book_historia/status/763106643630579713)). (Allie Newman (@Book\_Historia), Twitter, August 9, 2016, [https://twitter.com/book\\_historia/status/763106643630579713](https://twitter.com/book_historia/status/763106643630579713) ([https://twitter.com/book\\_historia/status/763106643630579713](https://twitter.com/book_historia/status/763106643630579713)).)



**Figure 3. Video orientation shared via Tumblr. Watch video here** (<http://upennmanuscripts.tumblr.com/post/155610861941/manuscript-monday-ljs-226-certain-astrological>). (Penn Libraries Manuscripts (@UPennManuscripts), Tumblr, January 9, 2017, <http://upennmanuscripts.tumblr.com/post/155610861941/manuscript-monday-ljs-226-certain-astrological> (<http://upennmanuscripts.tumblr.com/post/155610861941/manuscript-monday-ljs-226-certain-astrological>)).

This glimpse behind the archival curtain may be as simple as tweeting a smartphone photograph of a previously undigitized manuscript (Figure 1), through to a GIF demonstrating how a particular manuscript item might be manipulated,<sup>29</sup> to a video showing how the stacks appear or how they are accessed and arranged (Figure 2), to a Snapchat Story allowing the audience to shadow the curator-researcher in their examination of an item, to a manuscript “flyover,”<sup>30</sup> or to a video orientation shared on YouTube (Figure 3). In a piece outlining the social media strategy of Oxford’s Bodleian Library, Koszary states:

*The joy of social media is that it can be used to tell stories contained in our buildings, collections and work that otherwise may never have been heard by anyone. New discoveries are made every day in the Bodleian Libraries, but before social media these discoveries were often only known by a select few academics and staff... for use on social media [we take] the time to talk to our colleagues to discover the hidden stories of the Libraries and bring them to light.<sup>31</sup>*

Central to the success of using social media to publicize collections and invite opportunities for item interaction are those who oversee a collection’s social media policy and the curators who select and deliver relevant social media content. As Colleen Theisen explains,

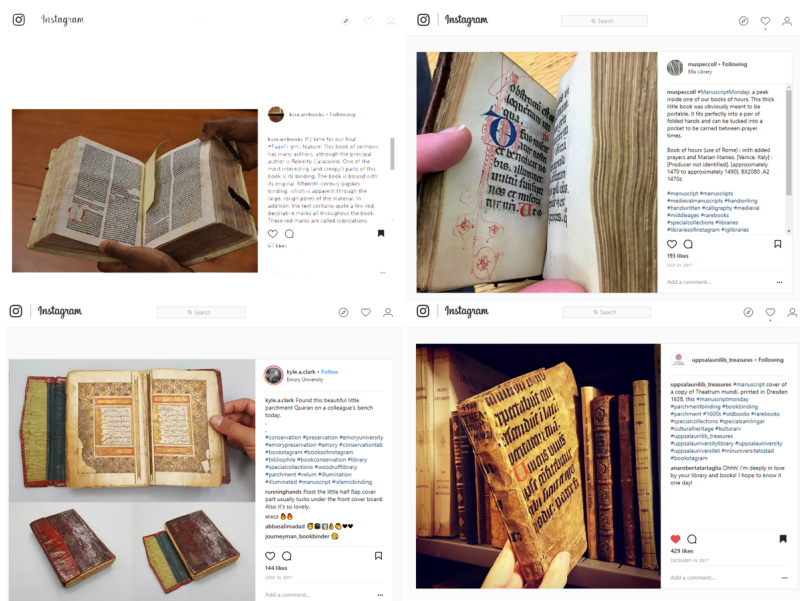
Special collections-centric social media work can create spaces where the spark of an interest in history begins, and where people envision themselves as connected to the long arm of history for the first time. . . . A personal relationship with a real-life librarian or archivist counters the pervasive stereotypes of dusty irrelevance. Cultural heritage professionals on social media can meaningfully demonstrate their love for their work and rare materials.<sup>32</sup>

As we have discussed, books are multisensory: they are a site of sound, smell, and touch as well as sight. As I have argued, for materially disenfranchised communities (such as the public, or students and scholars without physical access to medieval manuscripts), our medieval manuscripts are reduced—according to many recent theorists and critics—to sight alone when they are digitized.<sup>33</sup> The digital manuscript can be seen, they argue, but it cannot be held. However, in a 2015 blog for the Material Collective, Kerr Houston tackles direct these traditional jeremiads in relation to the sensory losses of the digital, and argues that the digital manuscript is not merely visual but rather is something brought alive by our fingers when encountered on our personal touch screen devices:

*[O]ver the past decade digital technologies have been utterly transformed. Due to interactive technologies and touch screens, we no longer merely look at screens and digital images, but regularly interact with them. We swipe or type; we tap or pinch. We become deeply familiar with the whoosh of a sent text message, and we strike up conversations with Siri. We peer at a section of a digitized page from the British Library’s online catalogue of illuminated manuscripts, and then slowly run our finger across the scroll wheel of our mouse to reveal the remainder. And so on: even if digital technology doesn’t precisely replicate the experience of reading a traditional book, it’s evident that it can—rather like a book—foster a range of sensory experiences beyond the visual. . . . **Far from prompting a loss in tactility, perhaps digital devices are reminding us of the importance of touch.**<sup>34</sup>*

Indeed, with the ubiquity of touch technologies, social media is emerging as a transformative place for material engagement between holding institutions and their audiences quite simply because platforms such as Instagram exploit the importance of touch technology implicit in the digital devices used to access its content (i.e., inherently mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets). In the case of Instagram, this touch-based activity is marked, as it takes place most often on the image itself: users “double tap” the image to “like” (or “heart”) content. They swipe a finger back and forth across an image to reveal further content posted as a set; they touch images uploaded as a story (a video available either for twenty-four hours only or “pinned” to the head of a user’s profile as a “highlight”) to move the content along, they pinch an image to zoom, and they scroll profile archives and their home feed with their fingertips to reveal new content. Of key importance here is the centrality of the image to this activity: the image itself is the site upon which touch is focused.

Over the past two years or so, curators (by which I refer to librarians, researchers, students and anyone engaged in producing social media content involving medieval manuscript collections) have been exploiting the evolving capacity for touch-based interaction on Instagram, making increasing use of DIY digitization techniques to communicate the “bits of books” that traditionally remain unseen by many audiences, either because these audiences never have an opportunity to handle a medieval manuscript in the flesh, or because the details captured by personal images reveal information not accessible via the professional digitized image.<sup>35</sup> These posts capitalize on the audience’s materially disenfranchised desire to touch (something that they are traditionally prohibited from doing) by making use of the platform’s touch-based processes for interaction in combination with another means of connection between audience and, as Theisen calls it, the “long arm of history”—the presence of curatorial hands.



**Figure 4. Examples of “visible” curatorial hands on Instagram.** (Clockwise from top left: Bentley Rare Book Museum (@ksurarebooks), Instagram, October 31, 2016, [https://www.instagram.com/p/BMP5Dm\\_DxXK/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BMP5Dm_DxXK/) ([https://www.instagram.com/p/BMP5Dm\\_DxXK/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BMP5Dm_DxXK/)). Mizzou Special Collections (@muspeccoll), Instagram, July 31, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BXNin8sAwPX/?taken-by=muspeccoll> (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BXNin8sAwPX/?taken-by=muspeccoll>). Uppsala University Library Treasures (@uppsalaunilib\_treasures), Instagram, December 18, 2017, [https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc1APrjzIV/?taken-by=uppsalaunilib\\_treasures](https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc1APrjzIV/?taken-by=uppsalaunilib_treasures) ([https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc1APrjzIV/?taken-by=uppsalaunilib\\_treasures](https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc1APrjzIV/?taken-by=uppsalaunilib_treasures)). Kyle Clark (@Kyle.A.Clark), Instagram, June 14, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BVVXTrUlseE/> (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BVVXTrUlseE/>).



**Figure 5. An example of “inferred” curatorial hands on Instagram. Watch video here** (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BY9BeWeAZNp/?taken-by=uofgcodicologist>). (Johanna Green (@UofGCodicologist), Instagram, September 12, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BY9BeWeAZNp/?taken-by=uofgcodicologist> (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BY9BeWeAZNp/?taken-by=uofgcodicologist>).

Both visible and inferred, these curatorial hands and fingers serve to connect the audience to the object in a more haptic and engaged manner that is currently possible via a digital manuscript viewer. The manuscripts are no longer disembodied by the digital skin they wear but are enlivened by the hands that manipulate them for the Instagram audience. By using theorizations of the aura of the original object/image by Barthes,<sup>36</sup> the reproduction of the object by Benjamin,<sup>37</sup> and the sensory connections between object and audience by Brolloz<sup>38</sup> respectively, I here argue that Instagram provides users with a digital “hands-on” experience of medieval manuscripts, one that offers a significantly different encounter and experience than that of a digital manuscript viewer or in a traditional physical exhibition. Just as Kim argues the medieval manuscript is better understood as a *mise-en-système* than a *mise-en-page*—that is, a site of interaction, recreation, and reinterpretation—so we might better understand the digital manuscript presented via Instagram, as a site for engagement, exploration and, crucially, *touch*.<sup>39</sup> Thus, though the platform has visual content at its focus, its communicative offerings are not simply ocularcentric; it is digitally haptic.

#### Connectivity, Object, and Aura

To draw from Walter Benjamin’s consideration of the reproduction, the digital image of a manuscript—though a new object in its own right—allows us to render accessible forms of interaction and means of knowing that are simply not possible with the original object. Benjamin states:

*The whole sphere of authenticity eludes technological—and of course not only technological—reproduction. . . . [T]echnological reproduction is more independent of the original than is manual reproduction. . . . in photography it can bring out aspects of the original that are accessible only to the lens (which is adjustable and can easily change viewpoint) but not to the human eye; or it can use certain processes, such as enlargement or slow motion, to record images which escape natural optics altogether. . . . [T]echnological reproduction can place the copy of the original in situations which the original itself cannot attain. Above all, it enables the original to meet the recipient halfway.<sup>40</sup>*

Given my earlier discussion—that for materially disenfranchised audiences, the “original” object is outside reach, and thus the digital encounter takes the place of the original—the digital manuscript performs a specific function in that it places both the original codex, and the audience, in a situation that neither could otherwise attain: it places them together and within reach.<sup>41</sup> This last point is crucial: the digital touch screen permits touch with the reproduced object, via tapping, swiping, pinching, or scrolling, which in turn manipulates the digital manifestation of the original in front of the audience by their own hands. The ubiquity of the touch screen experience in relation to social media interaction with digital content, particularly within the Instagram platform, means this connection between (digital) object and audience is an inherently haptic one.<sup>42</sup>

To examine the transformative potential of the digital manuscript shared via Instagram, an understanding of the digital manuscript as object, likened to Barthes’s photograph, is helpful. In his 1981 work *Camera Lucida*, Barthes argues for the haptic connections between the object photographed and the photograph’s audience. He states: “The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here. . . . A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.”<sup>43</sup>

In this sense, we may consider the manuscript codex a “body” which, via the digital image, emanates radiations that touch the viewer; the skin of the manuscript captured digitally on screen continues to convey haptic qualities via the visual medium. Our connection with the manuscript through this digital lens is therefore not one simply of sight but has always been one of touch. This connection is made in two ways: we touch visually, by our connection to the referent

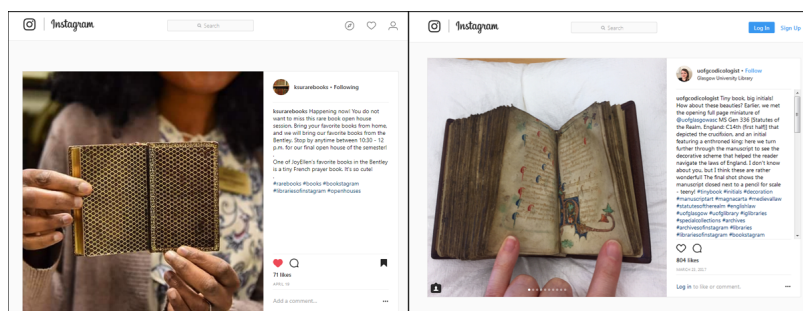
through the visual object, but we also touch via the connection of our fingertips to our touch screens, tapping to “like” an image, swiping to reveal further media, pinching to zoom a specific detail, scrolling to reveal an archive. Since this interaction is typically undertaken via a personal mobile device such as a smartphone or a tablet, the user engages in an intimate and individual experience of discovery, albeit one that is made possible via the manuscript’s new digital skin and that is accessible to an infinite community of users simultaneously. As Houston explains,

*perhaps our interest in the materiality of books is not inspired solely by the cold realization of what digital facsimiles cannot offer us. Perhaps, rather, the very novelty and complexity of our emergent relations with digital devices—the appeal of a swipe; the click of a mouse—has attuned us to a range of sensations that we long overlooked, or occasionally took for granted. Far from prompting a loss in tactility, perhaps digital devices are reminding us of the importance of touch . . . maybe [our perception of the physical qualities of the medieval book] has actually been heightened by our intricate and tactile relations with our phones, and e-readers, and laptops. After all, medieval manuscripts were also manufactured, in the traditional sense of the term, as they were literally made by hands. The same hands, that is, that now bring text into being by typing and tapping, and that allow us to know the world around us, and books, and screens.<sup>44</sup>*

Given that Instagram is designed around the user’s capacity for touch, this makes the audience’s encounter with the digital object highly sensory, given the perceived limitations of the digital environment for haptic engagement. Instagram thus capitalizes on the personal interaction between audience and image. Unlike Twitter or Facebook, the user is not limited to selecting a paratextual intermediary, such as a “thumbs up” or “heart” icon to interact with the content. The interaction is with, and is indeed on, the site of the image itself—the carnal medium, the shared skin. The audience also does not manipulate the image before them via a secondary technological intermediary sitting between them and the screen (i.e., via a mouse or a keyboard acting in the place of the hand), but by their fingers, direct on the screen, and thus on the image itself. Digital in this specific space therefore acts as connector from original object, through digital reproduction, to the hands of audiences; we touch so that we might know.<sup>45</sup>

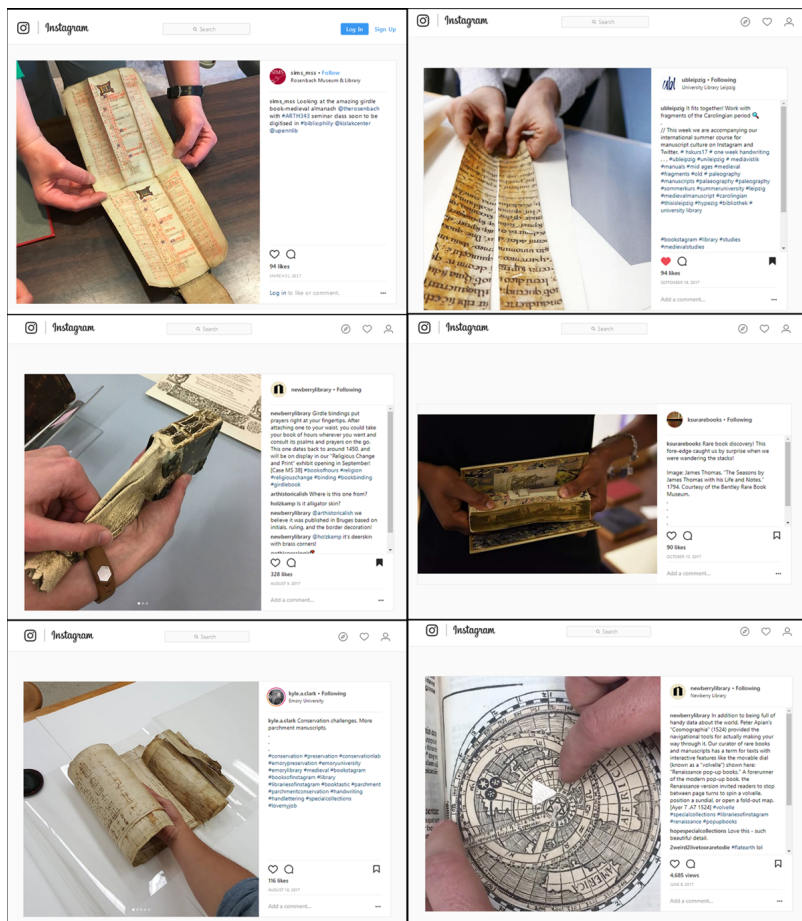
## Curatorial Hands as Haptic Intermediary

This bodily connection is further strengthened by the presence—both visible and inferred—of curatorial hands that manipulate the manuscript “body” for photography, whether static or moving image.



**Figure 6. Offering a haptic connection: curatorial hands holding open manuscripts and rare books.** (Left: Bentley Rare Book Museum (@ksurarebooks), Instagram, April 19, 2018, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BhwWMrAxii/> (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BhwWMrAxii/>). Right: Johanna Green (@UofGCodicologist), Instagram, March 23, 2017, [https://www.instagram.com/p/BR\\_tyG3A5VJ/?taken-by=uofgcodicologist](https://www.instagram.com/p/BR_tyG3A5VJ/?taken-by=uofgcodicologist) ([https://www.instagram.com/p/BR\\_tyG3A5VJ/?taken-by=uofgcodicologist](https://www.instagram.com/p/BR_tyG3A5VJ/?taken-by=uofgcodicologist)).)

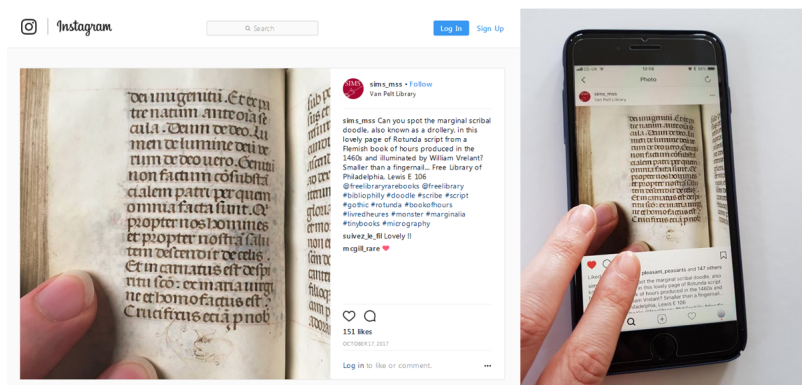




**Figure 7. Curatorial hands manipulating the manuscript “body.”** (Clockwise from top left: Penn Libraries Manuscripts (@UPennManuscripts), Instagram, March 21, 2017, [https://www.instagram.com/p/BR6vdYzjgdt/?taken-by=sims\\_mss](https://www.instagram.com/p/BR6vdYzjgdt/?taken-by=sims_mss) ([https://www.instagram.com/p/BR6vdYzjgdt/?taken-by=sims\\_mss](https://www.instagram.com/p/BR6vdYzjgdt/?taken-by=sims_mss)). University Library Leipzig (@ubleipzig), Instagram, September 18, 2017, [https://www.instagram.com/p/BZL\\_TMUFNSv/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BZL_TMUFNSv/) ([https://www.instagram.com/p/BZL\\_TMUFNSv/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BZL_TMUFNSv/)). Bentley Rare Book Museum (@ksurarebooks), Instagram, October 13, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BaMcF0xF1Mp/> (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BaMcF0xF1Mp/>). Newberry Library (@newberrylibrary), Instagram, June 8, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BVFGdNvn1eJ/?taken-by=newberrylibrary> (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BVFGdNvn1eJ/?taken-by=newberrylibrary>). Kyle Clark (@kyle.a.clark), Instagram, August 18, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BX8X3CBFAof/> (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BX8X3CBFAof/>). Newberry Library (@newberrylibrary), Instagram, August 9, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BXkwMv4nAzh/> (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BXkwMv4nAzh/>).

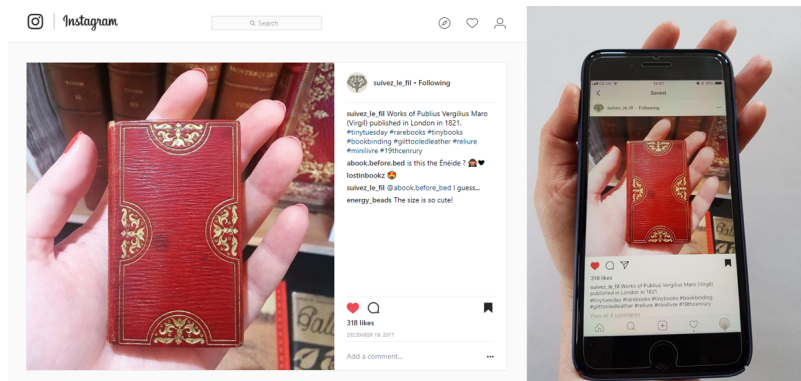
In a 2016 article for the *Journal of Artists' Books*, artist Deidre Brollo examined the use of photographs of hands and fingers reproduced within a series of artists' books. In so doing, she argues for a tangible and a haptic connection between the aura of the hands presented by the photographic reproductions, and the hands of the audience manipulating both the pages and the hands and fingers captured in front of them. She states: “As Roland Barthes and others have argued, the connection made between the subject, the lens, and the photograph goes beyond that of sight; it is of the order of touch. The image of the hand in the artist’s book is an invitation to touch, for the reader’s hand to touch the hand in the photograph, an invitation to empathy, an invitation to bridge distances.”<sup>46</sup>

Her consideration of the hand as intermediary is striking for a reconsideration of the use of social media platforms, such as Instagram, by rare books librarians and researchers to communicate medieval manuscripts. The presence of hands, both seen and inferred, are a constant presence in the media these curators share, and they have a transformative power for the audience’s connection to materiality. The use of images of medieval manuscripts on Instagram, particularly moving image and those captured during active handling by a curator, invoke a renewed contact between photograph (here digital media) and hand. As Brollo succinctly describes, “the photograph becomes once again an object to be touched. . . . Sight is not privileged over touch, and the hand recalls its role as an organ of perception.”<sup>47</sup>

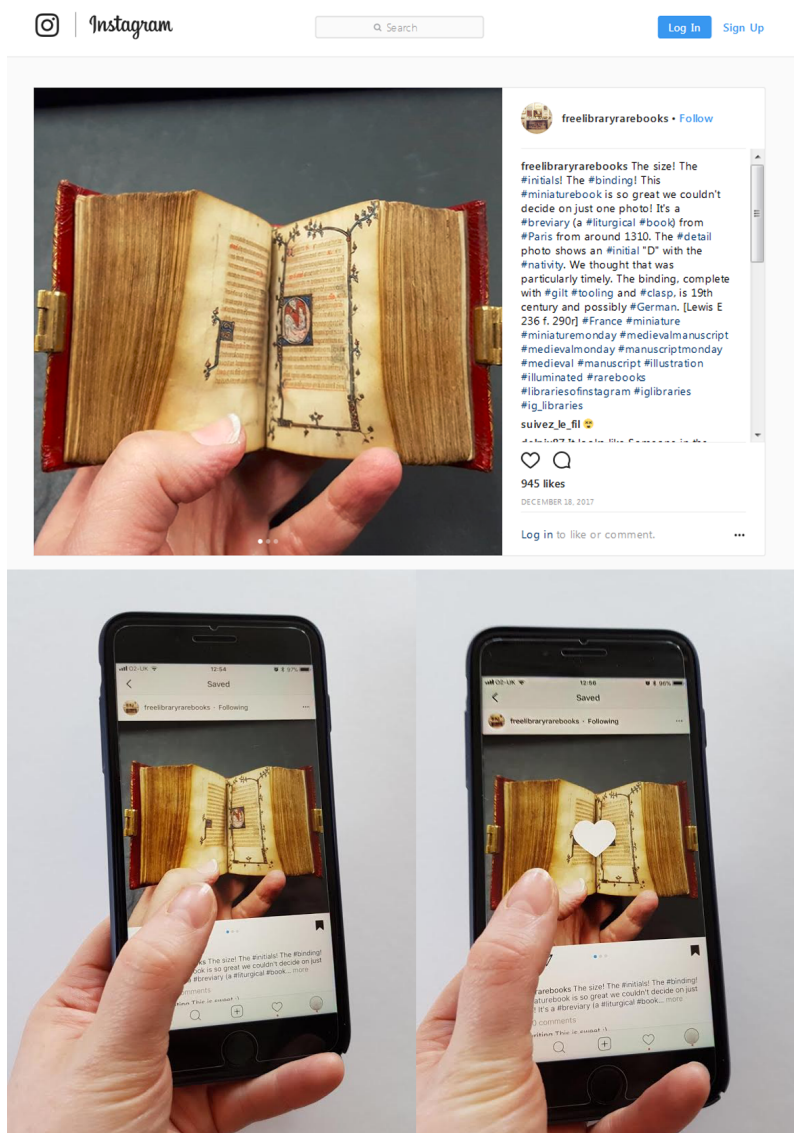


**Figure 8. Digital manuscripts as sites of touch: inviting touch via curatorial hands in an Instagram post (left) and enacting that touch on the post's digital image (right).** (Left: Penn Libraries Manuscripts (@UPennManuscripts), Instagram, October 17, 2017, [https://www.instagram.com/p/BaXPMpJHF3e/?taken-by=sims\\_mss](https://www.instagram.com/p/BaXPMpJHF3e/?taken-by=sims_mss) ([https://www.instagram.com/p/BaXPMpJHF3e/?taken-by=sims\\_mss](https://www.instagram.com/p/BaXPMpJHF3e/?taken-by=sims_mss)). Right: photograph by author.)

Curatorial hands thus play a central role in communicating the whole book, or the *plenitext*, to materially disenfranchised audiences; this content assists audience engagement in actively re-enacting the gestures of book manipulation and of reading. The visual examples included here demonstrate the connective presence of curatorial hands as visible intermediaries in Instagram content of medieval manuscripts. They provide scale via which the original object may be compared, they hold open a manuscript enacting the handling processes of the original object, and through each example they actively touch the page, providing a haptic point of connection between viewer and digital image.<sup>48</sup> The images provided here demonstrate how the audience is invited to do the same with the digital image: to place their fingers over the curators', to imitate and re-enact the handling demonstrated onscreen, and to use their hands to manipulate and interact with the digital object in front of them via the means of engagement described above.



**Figure 9. Curatorial hands as haptic connector: original Instagram content (left) and demonstration of haptic interaction with that digital manuscript (right).** (Left: Ariane (@suivez\_le\_fil), Instagram, December 19, 2017, [https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc5K3dgBX3\\_/?taken-by=suivez\\_le\\_fil](https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc5K3dgBX3_/?taken-by=suivez_le_fil) ([https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc5K3dgBX3\\_/?taken-by=suivez\\_le\\_fil](https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc5K3dgBX3_/?taken-by=suivez_le_fil)). Right: photograph by author.)



**Figure 10. Demonstrating haptic engagement on the site of the digital manuscript: curatorial hands as haptic intermediary (top) and digital manuscript as site of touch-based engagement, enacted via tapping the image direct to “like” or “heart” it (bottom).** (Top: Rare Book Department of the Free Library of Philadelphia (@freelibraryrarebooks), Instagram, December 18, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc2hp8xgzXM/> (https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc2hp8xgzXM/)). Bottom: photographs by author.)

To reuse Endres’s words, cited earlier, placing finger upon finger, touching the image directly with the fingertip, contributes to the audience’s capacity for “knowing through aesthetic experience . . . inviting viewers into a cultural encounter in which their knowing is remade or where the experience opens the possibility of an altered or enhanced knowing.”<sup>49</sup> The presence of curatorial hands signals something else: the audience is not in the presence of a surrogate but is accessing the analogue “original” as experienced by that curator at that point in time. Their hands give the object a *sense* of the analogue properties that the audience is separated from. Not only can the audience reconnect their hands as organs of perception through the touch-based interactions outlined above, but the hands visible on-screen, or inferred by the moving page captured in a video, bring the codex back into being as a fleshy object that has manipulability at its core. Given that we are seeing not a reproduction of the professional digitization (the digitized manuscript we see in a manuscript viewer, or extracts of those images thereof shared as social media content) but a digital manifestation of the manuscript in the real space of the reading room, I would like to close this article by arguing these social media posts enable one final thing: they offer this specific audience, via the digital image, a sense of the “aura” of the original object—that is, for those specific audiences who cannot access the object’s aura in any other way. Benjamin writes,

*[I]n the work of art this process [reproduction] touches on a highly sensitive core, more vulnerable than that of any natural object. That core is its authenticity. The authenticity of a thing is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it. Since the historical testimony is founded on the physical duration, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction, in which the physical duration plays no part. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object, the weight it derives from tradition.<sup>50</sup>*



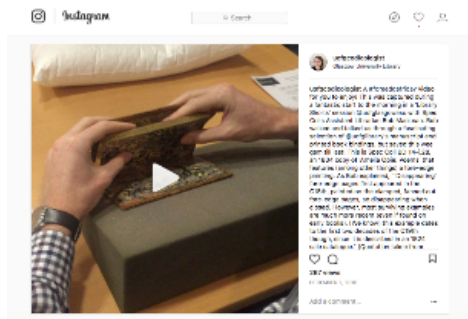
And yet, as I believe I have here demonstrated, it is via these DIY digitization posts that curators are circumventing this “loss” not just of sensory engagement but the perceived loss of the “aura” of encountering the original object. Their posts provide access to the codex as object, rather than just flat text/image, thereby communicating the manuscript’s materiality in a more immediate manner than is typically provided via a digital manuscript viewer. The sensory losses so often lamented in scholarship appraising manuscript digitization are mitigated via these Instagram posts: the play of light over an illuminated initial, the crackle of parchment as a folio is turned, a sense of the weight of the codex as the manuscript is lifted and manipulated, the scale of the object in real space, and the buckling topography of a folio are each made accessible via video post, Instagram Boomerang or Stories,<sup>51</sup> and microphotography. The immediacy of these posts (many photographed and posted live, in real time as the curator handles the object) offer the audience the opportunity to accompany the curator in the stacks and the reading room, encountering these manuscripts—and thus these sensory experiences—concomitantly.<sup>52</sup> The space in which these manuscripts are housed and accessed by curators and researchers is made as visible as the material, codicological body of the manuscripts themselves. After all, Benjamin is considering the static art image, not a manipulable object that may also be conceived as a work of art and likewise reproduced. Thus, the jeopardy of the original object is not the same when we consider the digital moving image of a manuscript, though reproduce it does. The static digital image accessed via a digital viewer does not move as the manuscript does. It either sits still, or is manipulated via zoom or in the click from one folio to the next. In some digital viewers, the images are imbued with a false materiality, manifested in the “turning-the-pages” technology that curls the folio corners and sweeps the parchment from right to left and back again, making what might only be described as a machinic sound as it does so.<sup>53</sup> One may argue this false layering of materiality, of sensory qualities, is done in direct response to the anxiety expressed in the reproduction of a manuscript from its fleshy entirety, its *plenitext*, to its digital image, where its sensory qualities are perceived to have been lost. It is perhaps only now that we are far enough into the digital age to be able to reflect on our early digital decisions that this sensory skin puts our teeth on edge: we view digital sensory additions critically (such as the turning the pages’ auditory and haptic interpretations of a manuscript being manipulated) because we now have creative distance from it. Nevertheless, the moving images displayed in Figures 11, 12, 13, and 14, though also digital reproductions, serve not to jeopardize the original object’s “aura” as Benjamin would have us believe, or to attempt to bridge the material divide by means of a digitally created sensory remediation, but to connect the original object to new audiences via the digital skin of the moving image, imbued with the “aura” of the original through the presence of curatorial hands:



**Figure 11. Inviting the audience into the manuscript using moving image. Watch video here** (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BRRGCQiA4tZ/?taken-by=uofgcodicologis>). (Johanna Green (@UofGCodicologis), Instagram, March 15, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BRRGCQiA4tZ/?taken-by=uofgcodicologis> (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BRRGCQiA4tZ/?taken-by=uofgcodicologis>).)



**Figure 12. Communicating the manipulability of the codex using moving image. Watch video here** ([http://href="https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc2zi-kl4kg/?taken-by=herman\\_nick](http://href="https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc2zi-kl4kg/?taken-by=herman_nick)). (Nick Herman (@herman\_nick), Instagram, December 18, 2017, [https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc2zi-kl4kg/?taken-by=herman\\_nick](https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc2zi-kl4kg/?taken-by=herman_nick) ([https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc2zi-kl4kg/?taken-by=herman\\_nick](https://www.instagram.com/p/Bc2zi-kl4kg/?taken-by=herman_nick)).)



**Figure 13. Revealing hidden details using moving image.**  
 Watch video here  
 (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BNhZBomhOA2/?taken-by=uofgcodicologist>). (Johanna Green (@UofGCodicologist), Instagram, December 2, 2016, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BNhZBomhOA2/?taken-by=uofgcodicologist> (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BNhZBomhOA2/?taken-by=uofgcodicologist>).)



**Figure 14. Communicating the play of light across an illuminated miniature using moving image. Watch video here**  
 (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BQgMTR7hGtN/?taken-by=uofgcodicologist>). (Johanna Green (@UofGCodicologist), Instagram, February 14, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BQgMTR7hGtN/?taken-by=uofgcodicologist> (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BQgMTR7hGtN/?taken-by=uofgcodicologist>).)

The content and codex of a manuscript are materialized by interaction with a technological platform: the text is materialized by the technology of the codex; the physical codex is materialized when it is manipulated by the hand; the digital image is materialized when it is called on screen and touched by the audience's fingertips. All are connected to one another because all must be "materialized" by interaction with the technological platform, interaction made manifest by the hand. They are made "real" because they are experienced. Just as postmodern theories of the archive argue that manuscripts are continually re-made by every reader, medieval to modern, so the digital manifestation of that manuscript is continually remade by its users. Interaction alters content: in one obvious sense, the trace of the hand through its digital skin is made manifest via the number of likes, views, and comments evidenced within the post itself. In a less obvious sense, with every view of the digital manuscript, the content is made anew, as it is encountered, experienced, and interpreted by each individual audience member. Their interaction, both on the site of the image itself and as individual embodied experiences of that digital manuscript, adds evidence to the digital record, whether these individual experiences are accessible to us or not. Their "hands-on" experiences are themselves materialized. The use of these haptic intermediaries not only communicates the performative materiality of the written heritage items being handled but in turn creates multifaceted spaces for the performative materiality of object and medium (analogue and digital) to be enacted, created, and interpreted by the audience and consumer. Drucker argues, "Objects exist in the world but their meaning and value are the result of a performative act of interpretation provoked by their specific qualities;" it is because the social media platform Instagram enables provocation of the specific qualities of manuscripts that the performative properties of said items may be actualized. She continues, "Description of material properties puts in play a series of interpretative events in which the performative dimensions of these properties are actualized in complex inter-relations, dependencies, contingencies, and circumstances."<sup>54</sup>

Thus, the variety of visual, haptic, and even auditory description permitted by the above approaches allows for the creation of digitally enabled explorative and interpretative spaces for the consumers of this media. By unlocking manuscript collections in this manner, social media has enabled cultural heritage custodians to augment the meaning-making experience of encountering a manuscript as a 2-D digital image in a digitally performative, fundamentally materially-orientated space. In *Time Binds*, Elizabeth Freeman argues for "an affective historiography" that is fundamentally "digital" as it relies on the senses—touch in particular—as a methodology or a means of encountering the

past, creating generative connections between past and present.<sup>55</sup> Thus, by offering a space for “hands-on” encounters with materially inaccessible objects via social media, curators communicate medieval manuscripts as dynamic objects, texts, forms of technology, and works of art. Most importantly, however, they offer up our written heritage as sites that permit, encourage, and are oriented around *touch*. In that sense, our manuscripts—through their digital skins—are once again made flesh.

FOOTNOTES

The diversity of bodily, material, and textual interactions with the medieval codex is particularly well-discussed across various outputs by Dr. Kathryn Rudy. Her 2010 article and 2017 chapter evidences how late-medieval readers interacted with manuscripts in highly physical ways, by rubbing and touching their books. Her research examines physical evidence from the books themselves—with signs of repeated abrasion—and concludes that such material evidence indicates that touching in these manners must have taken place ritualistically. In addition, her work on the social lives of medieval books (2015), the customization of medieval manuscripts by their owners (2016a), the inclusion of textiles and religious souvenirs sewn into fifteenth-century manuscripts, and the presence of pasted images that Rudy terms “parchament postcards” (2015) demonstrate the centrality of sensory and haptic interaction between early audiences and the medieval book. See: K. Rudy, “Dirty Books: Quantifying Patterns of Use in Medieval Manuscripts Using a Densitometer,” *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 2, nos. 1–2 (2010): 1–45, <https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2010.2.1.1> (<https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2010.2.1.1>); Rudy, *Postcards on Parchment: The Social Lives of Medieval Books* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Rudy, *Piety in Pieces: How Medieval Readers Customized their Manuscripts* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2016); Rudy, “Sewing the Body of Christ: Eucharist Wafer Souvenirs Stitched into Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts, Primarily in the Netherlands,” *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 1 (2016): 1–48, <https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2016.8.1.1> (<https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2016.8.1.1>); and Rudy, “Touching the Book Again: The Passional of Abbess Kunigunde of Bohemia,” in *Codex und Material*, Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien, ed. P. Carmassi and G. Toussaint (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017). [↗]

See, for example, discussions on the whole book, materialist philology, and plenitext by Nicholls and Wenzel and Treharne, inter alia. S. G. Nicholls and S. Wenzel, ed., *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); E. Treharne, “Fleshing Out the Text: The Transcendent Manuscript in the Digital Age,” *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 4, no. 4 (2013): 465–78. [↗]

I am indebted to my former University of Glasgow MSc Information Management and Preservation supervisee, Christine Baird, for numerous discussions of an early draft of this article during her dissertation research in the summer of 2017, discussions that considered both the nature of the book as material object and the various digital means of communicating the materiality of the codex. Her subsequent work on the accessibility of artists’ books in the Glasgow School of Art Library (GSA) drew on theorizations of the photograph as a site of touch and the use of curatorial hands as haptic intermediary, with particular reference to D. Brollo, “Fumbling Hands and Phantom Limbs: The Photograph, the Hand and the Artists’ Book,” *Journal of Artists Books* 39 (2016). Christine read an early draft of my article while forming the initial shape of her dissertation. In turn, her final dissertation inspired me to push further the idea of the Instagram post as photographic site of touch and to revisit the connectivity between the use of curatorial hands on Instagram and viewers’ own hands in offering digital “hands-on” experiences of our written heritage to public audiences. Christine’s dissertation is currently being prepared for publication. Her Pinterest campaign promoting the Artists’ Book Collection at the GSA Library makes active use of curatorial hands to express materiality and to promote haptic engagement. This exhibition can be found under “GSA Library Artists’ Books Collection” on Pinterest, accessed December 13, 2017, <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/gsalibrary/gsa-library-artists-books-collection/> (<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/gsalibrary/gsa-library-artists-books-collection/>). C. Baird, *Widening Access to the Glasgow School of Art Library Artists’ Book Collection* (University of Glasgow: Unpublished MSc Information Management and Preservation Dissertation, 2017). [↗]

By “partially fixed,” I mean to communicate that though individual digital pages may be turned, zoomed, or rotated, the point of axis for this movement is fixed as either a single-page or an open-book view; one may not, for example, rotate the manuscript to view its fore edges, the gatherings, or the spine of a manuscript; and it is not yet commonplace for digital viewers to allow users to manipulate digital manuscripts in 3-D virtual space. A notable exception to this description is William Endres’s St. Chad Gospels 3-D images; however, that particular technology is not yet ubiquitous across all digitization projects. Endres, “The 3D Gallery of the St Chad Gospels,” The Manuscripts of Lichfield Cathedral, accessed December 16, 2016, <https://lichfield.ou.edu/models/gallery> (<https://lichfield.ou.edu/models/gallery>). [↗]

J. Loxley et al., *Exhibiting the Written Word* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 2011): 6. [↗]

See: M. Faulkner et al., eds., “(Re)Presenting the Archive,” in *Archive Journal* (2014), accessed December 23, 2016, <http://www.archivejournal.net/roundtable/representing-the-archive/> (<http://www.archivejournal.net/roundtable/representing-the-archive/>). [↗]

W. Endres, “More Than Meets the Eye: Going 3-D with an Early Medieval Manuscript,” in *Proceedings of the Digital Humanities Congress 2012*, Studies in the Digital Humanities, ed. C. Mills, M. Pidd, and E. Ward (Sheffield: HRI Online Publications, 2014), sec. 3, <https://www.dhi.ac.uk/openbook/chapter/dhc2012-endres> (<https://www.dhi.ac.uk/openbook/chapter/dhc2012-endres>). [↗]

See: W. Endres, *The Manuscripts of Lichfield Cathedral* (2012), accessed January 3, 2017, <https://lichfield.ou.edu/> (<https://lichfield.ou.edu/>). [↗]

Endres, “More Than Meets the Eye,” sec. 4. [↗]

Here, I make reference to the practicalities of offering hands-on opportunities for large groups of the public, the challenges involved in making these items and these spaces accessible for disenfranchized groups, and the financial and practical difficulties inherent in offering hands-on access for colleagues based at universities and colleges geographically distant from manuscript collections. [↗]

For the purposes of this article, I here focus on general concerns relating to public access to written heritage only. However, many of the arguments put forward in this article will also be directly relevant to those instructors or students of the medieval book who do not have ready access to manuscript collections for hands-on learning. It is hoped the arguments put forward here may be further built upon with a more specific focus in making manuscript collections digitally accessible in different ways to these communities. One example of such digital access that would be worthy of further discussion is the “Virtual Classroom Visits” offered by the Schoenberg Institute of Manuscript Studies (accessed January 25, 2017, <https://schoenberginstitute.org/virtual-classroom-visits/> (<https://schoenberginstitute.org/virtual-classroom-visits/>)), during which “a curator at Penn will display and interact with books from our collection, while you and your class watches and asks questions via a video feed.” [↗]

While one may argue that access is a required—perhaps even an expected—part of the work life of a book historian, for the public, access is not only difficult but also not necessarily expected or required. However, the value of object handling for our understanding of medieval manuscript materiality is significant; the challenge discussed here is how we might communicate those experiences to a community without such material access. [↗]

Porter, “Medievalists and the Digital Scholarly Edition,” *Scholarly Editing: The Annual for the Association of Documentary Editing* 34 (2013): 1–26, accessed December 23, 2016, <http://scholarlyediting.org/2013/essays/essay.porter.html> (<http://scholarlyediting.org/2013/essays/essay.porter.html>). [↗]

In a 2015 chapter, Wendy Scase states, “In theory, digitization can bring manuscripts to larger and more diverse audiences and present those audiences with higher-quality access and interpretation than ever before. . . . While digital imaging and associated techniques enabled in the digital environment can in some ways be seen as the foundations for large but ultimately incremental steps in research, arguably, it is by opening up access that digitization has the greatest

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f(<http://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.u=http://www.archivejournal.net/essays/digital-manuscripts-as-sites-of-touch-using-social-media-for-hands-on-engagement-with-medieval-manuscript-materiality/>)  
✂(<https://plus.google.com/share?url=http://www.archivejournal.net/essays/digital-manuscripts-as-sites-of-touch-using-social-media-for-hands-on-engagement-with-medieval-manuscript-materiality/>)

claim to be giving medieval manuscripts a completely new lease of afterlife. **For this wide access to manuscript books is unprecedented in human history.**

**Throughout their history, manuscript books have been accessible only to very small audiences. In the Middle Ages, they were always objects for an elite.**" (W. Scase, "Afterlives of Medieval Manuscripts," in *Medieval Afterlives in Contemporary Culture*, ed. G. Ashton (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 315, emphasis mine. However, as critiques of early digital editions, particularly those early manifestations released on CD-ROM outline, despite the promise of accessibility, many digital resources are designed with the scholar—and not the public—in mind, thus retaining the status of the manuscript as an object for a specific, and limited, audience (see, for example, Kilbride's review of *Electronic Beowulf* in W. Kilbride, "Whose Beowulf Is It Anyway? Review of Electronic Beowulf [CD-ROM]," *Internet Archaeology* 9 (2000): [np], reviewing K. Kiernan's *Electronic Beowulf*, ed. A. Prescott et al. (London: British Library and the University of Michigan Press, 1999). Cited in W. Scase, "Afterlives of Medieval Manuscripts," in *Medieval Afterlives in Contemporary Culture*, ed. G. Ashton, 316. [↔])

With the exception of William Endres's work on 3-D images of medieval manuscripts, namely the St Chad Gospels; see note 4. [↔])

See Treharne's discussion of the term *plenitext* to refer to the "fleshy wholeness" of the manuscript: "To examine TEXT in this way, to seek out the wholeness of the textual experience, one might label the object of study, unambiguously, as *plenitext*. Plenitext will include the words, the images, the spaces, the folios, the quires, the binding and all other aspects of the material make-up of the book or fragment or leaf." Treharne, "Fleshing Out the Text," 465; 470. [↔])

J. Newall, "Old Objects, New Media: Historical Collections, Digitization and Affect," *Journal of Material Culture* 17, no. 3 (2012): 288, citing F. Cameron and S. Kenderdine, eds., *Theorizing Digital Cultural Heritage: A Critical Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007). [↔])

Newall, "Old Objects, New Media," 288. [↔])

J. Wilcox, *Scraped, Stroked, and Bound: Materially Engaged Readings of Medieval Manuscripts* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 3. [↔])

For studies and discussion of this concept in museological practice, see (inter alia): R. Mason, "Museums, Galleries and Heritage: Sites of Meaning-Making and Communication," in *Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader*, ed. G. Corsane (London and New York: Routledge, 2005): 200–14; T. Ansbacher, "Misunderstandings of *Meaning Making*," *Exhibitionist* 21, no. 1 (2002): 1–4; K. Charitonos, "Museum Learning via Social Media: (How) Can Interactions on Twitter Enhance the Museum Learning Experience?" in *Learning, Media and Technology Doctoral Conference*, July 4, 2011 (London, UK, 2011), <http://oro.open.ac.uk/id/eprint/33401> (<http://oro.open.ac.uk/id/eprint/33401>). [↔])

L. H. Silverman, "Visitor Meaning-Making in Museums for a New Age," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 38, no. 3 (1995): 162. [↔])

Brollo, "Fumbling Hands and Phantom Limbs," 40. [↔])

This assertion is correct as of April 5, 2018; future or subsequent changes to digital manuscript viewers by national collections may well address this gap. See, for example, plans for the British Library viewer outlined in M. Ridge, "There's a New Viewer for Digitised Items in the British Library's Collections," Digital Scholarship Blog, British Library, December 7, 2016, accessed January 05, 2018, <http://blogs.bl.uk/digital-scholarship/2016/12/new-viewer-digitised-collections-british-library.html> (<http://blogs.bl.uk/digital-scholarship/2016/12/new-viewer-digitised-collections-british-library.html>). [↔])

C. O. Frost, "When the Object Is Digital: Properties of Digital Surrogate Objects and Implications for Learning," in *Perspectives on Object-Centered Learning in Museums*, ed. S. G. Paris (New York and London: Routledge, 2002): 73. [↔])

See, for example, A. Prescott, "The Imaging of Historical Documents," in *The Virtual Representation of the Past*. Digital Research in the Arts and Humanities, ed. M. Greengrass and L. Hughes. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 7–22; H. F. Ball, "Limitations and Ethical Implications of Digitizing Medieval Manuscripts," *Library Student Journal* (2011); A. Chen, "In One's Own Hand: Seeing Manuscripts in a Digital Age," *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (2012); A. S. G. Edwards, "Back to the Real: What Do We Lose When We Replace Access to Manuscripts with Digitisation?" *Times Literary Supplement* (June 7, 2013), accessed January 25, 2017, <http://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/private/back-to-the-real-2/> (<http://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/private/back-to-the-real-2/>); Treharne, "Fleshing Out the Text," 465–78; S. Werner, "Where Material Book Culture Meets Digital Humanities," *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1, no. 3 (2012); Wilcox, *Scraped, Stroked, and Bound*; M. Nolan, "Medieval Habit, Modern Sensation: Reading Manuscripts in the Digital Age," *The Chaucer Review* 47, no. 4 (2013): 465–76; and A. Kähkö, *Digital Representations of the Material: The Medieval Manuscript in the Digital Medium* (Unpublished MA Thesis: Leiden University, 2016), accessed November 23, 2016, <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/37770> (<https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/37770>), inter alia. [↔])

Frost, "When the Object Is Digital," 73–74. [↔])

S. E. Hapgood, and A. S. Palincsar, "Fostering an Investigatory Stance: Using Text to Mediate Inquiry with Museum Objects," in *Perspectives on Object-Centered Learning in Museums*, ed. S. G. Paris (2002), 156; 171. [↔])

J. Drucker, "Performative Materiality and Theoretical Approaches to Interface," *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (2013): 4 and 24. Emphasis mine. [↔])

See, for example: Erik Kwakkel (@erikkwakkel), "Six books, one binding." Tumblr, January 23, 2014, accessed April 7, 2018, <http://erikkwakkel.tumblr.com/post/74300240443/six-books-one-binding-heres-something-special> (<http://erikkwakkel.tumblr.com/post/74300240443/six-books-one-binding-heres-something-special>). [↔])

See, for example: Johanna Green (@UofGCodicologist), "Another #woodcutwednesday manuscript flyover from @uofglasgowasc's Blockbook Apocalypse!..." Instagram, December 21, 2016, accessed April 7, 2018, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BOSXFPQhrwL> (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BOSXFPQhrwL>). [↔])

A. Koszary, "The Bodleian Libraries and Social Media: How We Succeed with Our Strategy," in *International Conference on Digital Libraries (ICDL) 2016: Smart Future* (New Delhi: The Energy and Resources Institute, 2016), 91. [↔])

C. Theisen, "Toward a Culture of Social Media in Special Collections," in *New Directions for Special Collections: An Anthology of Practice*, ed. L. M. Thomas and B. M. Whittaker (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2017), 226; 230. [↔])

See, for example, Wilcox, who states outright that "digital facsimiles fail to engage senses other than sight," and Drucker, who discusses in detail how digital representation of codicological features such as those demonstrated by the "turning-the-pages" technology trivializes those book properties that it attempts to recreate. J. Wilcox, *Scraped, Stroked, and Bound*, 3; and J. Drucker, "The Virtual Codex: From Page Space to e-Space," in R. Siemens and S. Schreibman, eds., *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 216–32). [↔])

K. Houston, "Surface and Substance," The Material Collective (blog) post from January 13, 2015, accessed October 12, 2017, <http://thematerialcollective.org/surface-substance/> (<http://thematerialcollective.org/surface-substance/>). Emphasis mine. [↔])

The term "DIY Digitization" has been employed by various curators to describe the process of photographing manuscripts individually, using a personal camera or—more commonly—a smartphone. While this practice may typically be seen in the reading room to support research, it also extends to images taken for the express purpose of being shared via social media, either by institutions through their official channels, or by individuals who share these images across their own social media profiles. The result is that huge quantities of digital data are produced by individuals and is currently not accessible by the holding institution (as the images taken are for personal use). In 2015, Daniel Wakelin piloted the "DIY Digitization" project with the Bodleian, in which they asked users engaged in the above practices to upload their subsequent images to a special Flickr page so that the library might create an archive of the ways in which their holdings had been photographed by users. See: Bodleian Special Collections (@BodleianSpecialCollections), "DIY Digitisation", Flickr, July 20, 2015, <https://www.flickr.com/groups/bodspecialcollections> (<https://www.flickr.com/groups/bodspecialcollections>). For further discussion of Flickr as a platform for amateur cultural heritage content, see M. Terras, "The Digital Wunderkammer: Flickr as a Platform for Amateur Cultural and Heritage Content," *Library Trends* 59, no. 4 (2011): 686–706. [↔])

R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981). [↔])

W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1936; Reprinted

2008). [↗]

Brollo, “Fumbling Hands and Phantom Limbs,” 40–44. [↗]

Dorothy Kim, Twitter direct message to author, January 8, 2018. Views communicated are forthcoming in D. Kim, “Building Pleasure in the Digital Archive” in *Bodies of Information: Feminist Debates in Digital Humanities*, ed. J. Wernimont and E. Losh (University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming 2018). [↗]

Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, 21. Emphasis mine. [↗]

See Jennifer Borland’s chapter on what she describes as “the pedagogical and scholarly value of ostensibly inauthentic experiences” for an argument in support of using facsimiles and replicas as a means to create “authentic” experiences for audiences without access to “authentic” objects. In this piece, she argues that “some approaches dealing with the absence of the ‘authentic’ create experiences that are even better than the real thing,” a sentiment I would argue may also be true of the Instagram encounter with medieval manuscript materiality. J. Borland, “Encountering the Inauthentic,” in *Transparent Things: A Cabinet*, ed. M. M. Williams and K. E. Ovenbey (New York: Punctum Books, 2013), 19. [↗]

For two relevant discussions of the materiality of touch screen technology, see S. Werning, “Swipe to Unlock: How the Materiality of the Touchscreen Frames Media Use and Corresponding Perceptions of Media Content,” in “Digital Material/ism,” ed. A. Richterich, et al., *Digital Culture and Society* 1, no. 1 (2015): 55–72, and Y. Hui, “Towards a Relational Materialism: A Reflection on Language, Relations and the Digital,” in “Digital Material/ism,” *Digital Culture and Society* (2015): 131–48. [↗]

Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 80–81. [↗]

Houston, “Surface and Substance,” [np]. [↗]

For two related and insightful pieces on the centrality of touch for individual knowledge production, and the consuming role of touch in encountering medieval manuscripts, see the following: A. R. Bennett Segler, “Touched for the Very First Time: Losing My Manuscript Virginity,” in *Transparent Things: A Cabinet*, ed. M. M. Williams and K. E. Ovenbey, 39–55; and J. Borland, “Unruly Reading: The Consuming Role of Touch in the Experience of a Medieval Manuscript,” in Wilcox, *Scraped, Stroked and Bound*, 97–114. [↗]

Brollo, “Fumbling Hands and Phantom Limbs” 43. [↗]

Ibid., 40. [↗]

The aesthetic for the author’s photographs included here references Christine Baird’s Pinterest content developed for the Glasgow School of Art Library, which depicts curatorial hands holding and manipulating artists’ books against a white background. Baird explains this aesthetic decision: “A white matte background [was] employed to provide an unobtrusive surface against which to showcase the aesthetic qualities of the books and to better fit with house style as represented by existing GSA online exhibitions.” I similarly chose such a background to display the aesthetic qualities of digital engagement with medieval manuscripts on Instagram using a mobile device. Baird, *Widening Access to the Glasgow School of Art Library Artists’ Book Collection*, 11. [↗]

Endres, “More than Meets the Eye,” 3. [↗]

Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, 22. [↗]

A ‘Boomerang’ is a short, looping video common across (and a feature offered and supported by) the Instagram platform. See, for example: Allie Newman (@book\_historia), “Always use protection!...,” Instagram, September 19, 2016, [https://www.instagram.com/p/BKifjeNDfMx/?taken-by=book\\_historia](https://www.instagram.com/p/BKifjeNDfMx/?taken-by=book_historia) ([https://www.instagram.com/p/BKifjeNDfMx/?taken-by=book\\_historia](https://www.instagram.com/p/BKifjeNDfMx/?taken-by=book_historia)). [↗]

One area worthy of further study, not included in this article, is the use of emotive language to draw together communities interested in materiality, and to express the sensory experiences of manuscript handling. [↗]

See, for example, the animations and sounds layered upon the folios presented in the following digital viewers: “Fonds documentaire numérique de la médiathèque d’Albi: Manuscrits produits par le Scriptorium de la cathédrale Sainte-Cécile” [“Digital documentary collection of the media library of Albi: Manuscripts produced by the Scriptorium of the Sainte-Cécile Cathedral”], Ville d’Albi: Médiathèque Pierre Amalric, accessed April 5, 2018. [http://archivesnumeriques.mediatheques.grand-albigeois.fr/\\_images/OEB/RES\\_MS038\\_BIS/index.htm](http://archivesnumeriques.mediatheques.grand-albigeois.fr/_images/OEB/RES_MS038_BIS/index.htm) ([http://archivesnumeriques.mediatheques.grand-albigeois.fr/\\_images/OEB/RES\\_MS038\\_BIS/index.htm](http://archivesnumeriques.mediatheques.grand-albigeois.fr/_images/OEB/RES_MS038_BIS/index.htm)); “The Málaga Corpus of Late Middle English Scientific Prose,” University of Malaga, accessed April 5, 2018. <https://hunter.uma.es/> (<https://hunter.uma.es/>); “Turning the Pages,” The British Library, accessed April 5, <http://www.bl.uk/turning-the-pages/?id=fdbcc772-3e21-468d-8ca1-9c192f0f939c&type=book> (<http://www.bl.uk/turning-the-pages/?id=fdbcc772-3e21-468d-8ca1-9c192f0f939c&type=book>). [↗]

Drucker, “Performative Materiality and Theoretical Approaches to Interface,” 15 and 17. [↗]

E. Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). I am grateful to Roberta Magnani of Swansea University for bringing this book to my attention during our lengthy discussions on the nature of touch, fingers, and the digital, for the production of a joint conference paper for the Gender and Medieval Studies conference in Oxford, January 2018, entitled “Touching, Seeing, Feeling: Encountering Manuscripts through Digital ‘Skin.’” Roberta’s work on queer touch caused me to think further on the experience of touch through (digital) skin from the perspective of both object and audience, and the blurred/mirrored encounter of the object felt and agent touching. A joint article on this topic is currently in preparation. [↗]

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